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## On the Ancient Greek $\alpha\gamma\omega\upsilon$

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### Abstract

The Greek word  $\alpha\gamma\omega\upsilon$  (*agon*) means that many people assemble in some place to have a contest. Generally speaking, *agon* can be translated into contest, competition or disputation in modern English.

Undoubtedly, nearly all the ancient civilizations have some forms of contest in a certain degree. However, it is only in Greece that agonal spirit was fully developed and became a fundamental characteristic of society and culture. In Greece, there are two kinds of contest, one is physical, including athletic sports and war, the Olympic Games belongs to this kind. The other is in mentality, including contest of drama and poem, lawsuit, politics, philosophy, and etc. All these contests follow the “first only rule”, reflecting Greek concept of *philotimia* (love of honour). Greek civilization ended, while the agonal spirit continued to be a special feature in the western culture afterwards.

This article will expound the origin and development of the agonal spirit in Ancient Greece. At the same time, it will give an account of its social influences, and make a brief comparative study of agonal spirit between ancient China and Greece.

*Keywords:* Ancient Greece; *agon*; agonal spirit

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In ancient Greek, the word  $\alpha\gamma\omega\upsilon$  is used to indicate all kinds of contests. The Olympics Games writes as *A γων Ολυμπιας* (*Agon Olympias* in Latin).

In ancient Greece, *agon* is a common expression of contests, especially athletic games. In the new edited *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, *agon* has two basic meanings, firstly, it denotes the informal and extempore competitive struggles and rivalries that permeated Greek life in the general fight for success and survival, secondly, it means gathering of people, usually for formal contests in the honor of a god or local hero.<sup>1</sup> So, *agon* includes all formal and informal contests.

The verb form of *agon* is *agein*, it means to lead, bring, drive, weigh, and celebrate. The plural form is *agones*. It is very difficult to translate *agon* into modern English, for this kind of social movement has no equivalence in modern society, at the same time, the Greek word has no lineal offspring in modern English. The most appropriate word to translate *agon* is contest or competition. However, in modern English, *agon* indeed has a derivative, “agony”, it means extreme mental or physical suffering, a severe struggle. Obviously, it expresses some spiritual consequences of a contest. Of course, it is more difficult to translate the word into Chinese than English, but we may have a try. Because *agon* has two basic meanings, one is that many people gather together, the other is that they aim at holding a contest, so we can translate the word into *Saihui* (赛会) in Chinese.

Undoubtedly, some kinds of competition or contest exist in all ancient and modern civilizations, however, the agonal spirit and a series of game rules were fully developed in ancient Greece.

In the field of Classics, it is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844—1900) and Jacob Burckhardt (1818—1897) firstly discovered the central position of *agon* in ancient Greek society. However, it is admitted that Burckhardt expounded the problem overall and systematically in his posthumously published work *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*.<sup>ii</sup> The famous classicalist M.I. Finley (1912—1986) gave very high evaluation to the viewpoint of Burckhardt, he once said, “Burckhardt’s most brilliant ‘discovery’ was the central place of the *agon* in Greek life.”<sup>iii</sup> After Burckhardt, scholars of the classical field began pay more attention to *agon* of the ancient Greek. In his book named *Athletics of Ancient World*, Prof. Gardiner pointed out, “in ancient civilizations, no people has ever been dominated to such an extent by this drive as the Greeks were; no people has ever been so fond of competition.”<sup>iv</sup> Although some kinds of contests or games do exist in non-Greek civilizations, only the Greeks put it into the centre of their social life, hence a series of game rules was formed, the agonal spirit permeated in every aspects of their life, it created a very strong impression on the Greek thought, life style and political system. When the Greek civilization ended, the agonal spirit did not disappear, it continued play an important role in Roman and western civilizations afterwards.

In modern times, especially after the modern Olympic Games founded, western scholars have made a thorough investigation of the ancient Olympic Games.<sup>v</sup> The Chinese academic circles have also made much headway in this problem.<sup>vi</sup> But in China, the study of Greek *agon* and agonal spirit is comparatively weak. This paper will try to discuss three questions, firstly, what is Greek *agon* and agonal spirit; secondly, how the Greek *agon* and agonal spirit came into being in ancient Greece; finally, why this kind of spirit was not fully developed in the ancient non-Greek civilizations, including ancient China.

In all kinds of Greek *agon*, athletic games firstly appeared, it existed for about one thousand years. The most famous *agon* is the Olympic Games which was founded in 776 B.C. In fact, athletic games is only one form of Greek *agon*. We can say, as long as athletic games fully developed, the agonal spirit began to permeate into every field of the Greek’s social life. Just as Burckhardt said, “thus after the decline of heroic kingship all higher life among the Greeks, active as well as spiritual, took on the character of the *agon*. Here excellence (*arete*) and natural superiority were displayed, and victory in *agon*, that is noble victory without enmity, appears to have been the ancient expression of the peaceful victory of an individual. Many different aspects of life came to bear the marks of this form of competitiveness. We see it in the conversations and round-songs of guests in the symposium, in philosophy and legal procedure, down to cock-and quail-fighting or the gargantuan feat of eating.”<sup>vii</sup> Generally speaking, there are two kinds of *agon*, one is physical *agon*, it includes sport games, military training and war, the other is intellectual *agon*, it includes political or philosophical debate, lawsuit, drama contest, and etc. Besides, there are many other various contests in Greece, such as drinking contest, beauty contest and wool-cut contest.

Maybe, because of a frequent occurrence, the direct records and discourses on *agon* which is handed down to us by the Greeks is comparatively scarce.<sup>viii</sup> In the Classical times, it is through other nations that the Greeks recognized the uniqueness of this form of social life. The typical case is that when Herodotus visited Egypt, he is astonished to find out that the nation has no formal sport games.<sup>ix</sup>

There are two kinds of athletic games, one is Panhellenic, i.e. all the Greeks can participate, the other is local, i.e., it is held by one polis. Among the Panhellenic games, the most important are these four games, Olympic Games (founded at 776 B.C.), Pythian Games (founded at 582 B.C.), Isthmian Games (founded at 581 B.C.) and Nemean Games (founded at 573 B.C.). The four games differ from one another, the Olympic Games is held every four years (other three games are held every two years), it only installs athletic events (the other three also install music and poem contests), so the Olympic games is the purest Panhellenic *agon* as well as the most influential. Apart from these Panhellenic games, there are countless local games. The common feature of the two kinds of games is that they are all belonging to some religious worship, they are a part of some religious festivals. This is an important difference between ancient and modern Olympic Games. Apart from that the partakers are different, there is another noteworthy difference between Panhellenic games and local games, i.e., all the Panhellenic games are Crown Games, because the winner’s prize is token prize, he will obtain a wreath is weaved by some local tree branches.<sup>x</sup> While local games are money games or cash games, the winner’s prize is money award or some valuable objects. Compared with modern sport games, the events of ancient games is very few, but the contests are more excited than today, because these games follow the “first-only rule”, i.e., one event, one winner, there seems no so-called participating spirit as today, the wreath is the only target, it is shameful and deplorable to lose, so there is a famous saying at that time: “either the wreath or death”.<sup>xi</sup> Besides, there is no sport record as today, the winner attaches more importance to how many times he get success. In Athens, there is a custom, when a boy is born in a citizen’s family, an olive wreath will be hung out of the door.<sup>xii</sup> Although there is only token prize in Panhellenic games,

when the winners go home, they will obtain a lot of valuable objects and many privileges. These winners will also achieve high prestige, great power and influence in their polis.<sup>xiii</sup> Finley pointed out, it is the love of honor (*philotimia*) makes the Greeks be crazy for *agon*.<sup>xiv</sup>

With regard to the origin of the Olympic Games, the Greeks are inclined to trace it back to the mythical times. There are several versions of how some god founded the Olympic Games. For instance, somebody holds that the game is founded after Zeus defeated Cronus in wrestling. Another view is that the games is founded after Heracles of Thebes conquered Elis and revenged on its king Ageus. Yet Strabo thought these sayings were all incredible.<sup>xv</sup>

The earliest record of athletic games is in Homer. The most famous sport games in the epic is the games which is held after the funeral of Patroclus. It is noteworthy that the partakers of the games are generally from royal family, the ordinary soldiers are excluded. The winner's prize is some valuable objects, such as big bronze pots, horses and women slaves. In fact, these articles for daily use are not the main target of the contest, honor is the most important.<sup>xvi</sup> Although there are many controversies about the epic, we can depict some outlines of the origin of sport games from it, on the one hand, the earliest sport games are held only within the scope of kings and aristocrats, this is in accordance with the spring up of aristocracy of that time, on the other hand, as the core of agonal spirit, the concept of love of honor was formed, it became the basic idea of *agon* afterward.

In the Archaic Age (8-6 century B.C.), Greek *polis* came into being, at the same time, monarchy and aristocracy were on the wane. It is in this age that the Panhellenic games was founded. In his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Burckhardt named this age "the Agonal Age", because before this time, "the *agon* was as yet an occasional rather than a regular occurrence, and it was not until the period of *agon* that the whole of life was directed to this activity, and only then the victors became the celebrities."<sup>xvii</sup> In Olympia, 776 B.C., the first Olympic Games was held. Afterwards, it was held every four years.<sup>xviii</sup> The first Olympic Games is indeed an milestone in Greek history, before this time, in Greece, there are only some local games which are held around some local shrines or temples, the Olympic Games created a new tradition, because it have many sport events, no political restrictions, it attracts numerous partakers all around Greece from the beginning. In the first quarter of the six century B.C., the other three Panhellenic games were founded in succession, apart from athletic contests, there also installed music, poem and choral contests, thus enriched the content of *agon*. Panhellenic *agon* gives the Greeks a national identity first time in history, because in the *polis* system, there is no central government in Greece all the while, the Panhellenic *agon* became the only tie which united the Greeks together. It also became the line of demarcation between the Greeks and the non-Greeks. During the period of the Greek polis, this line is always very strict and clear, the non-Greeks has no qualifications and opportunities to take part in these games, until the Macedonian and Roman times.

Even though the four Panhellenic games were founded, the local games were also developing. In Pindar's odes, more than 20 local games were mentioned. On a monument from Laconia about 5 century B.C., it was recorded that a person named Damonon and his son Engmacratidas achieved 72 times of successes in 8 local games in Peloponnese.<sup>xix</sup> Because the four Panhellenic games were held alternately, nearly each year there were some important sport games, the tradition of sport circuit (*periodos*) was formed. In this period, the partakers of these games were no longer only kings and aristocrats, in theory all the citizens of the *polis* who had no crime records could take part.<sup>xx</sup> However, because the contest spots were scattered in different regions of Greece, only the rich could afford the high expenses of taking part in these games frequently.<sup>xxi</sup>

In fact, the popularization of the Greek sport games has a very close relation with the changing of battle form in this time. When hoplites (heavy infantry soldiers) became more and more important in battles, they achieved more civil rights than before, at the same time, the sport games became the most regular form of military training. The Greeks linked the sport games with military training very closely. In the *polis* system, the citizen group and state army were identical, the citizens were engaged in farming and military training in peacetime, when the war broke out, they would go to the battlefield. So in the Greeks' opinion, battle was a kind of *agon*, compared with sport games, it was nothing but more dangerously. Prof. Golden pointed out that we should not exaggerate the function of the Secret Truce of the Panhellenic games excessively, because it was truce (*ekecheiria*), not peace (*eirene*), that is to say, only the battles around the region of the Panhellenic games were forbidden, the truce was in order to prevent the battles from disrupting the games.<sup>xxii</sup>

In the Classical Age, the content of the Greek *agon* became more and more variegated. Beside athletic games, the agonal spirit began to permeate into every aspect of the Greek's social life. The most important change is that the Greek *agon* enlarged from external and physical sphere to inside mental and intellectual sphere. This internalization

of the agonal spirit mainly embodied at the philosophical debate, lawsuit, political speech, the drama contest, and etc.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Another noteworthy change of the Greek *agon* in Classical Age is the weakening of religious element. As is well known to all that the Greek *agon* had a very close relation to religion, the earliest sport games were all affiliated to some local worship or cult.<sup>xxiv</sup> The aim of the ancient Olympic Games is honoring the gods. The people expect that there are some kinds of contest in the religion festival or some hero's funeral. Each Panhellenic game is related to the worship of some god. For example, Olympia is the centre of the worship of Zeus, the Pythian Games has a close relation to Apollo, thus music contest is the most important. In the Classical Age, the Olympic Games lasted for six days, the first day of the celebrations probably devoted to sacrifices, prayers, oath taking, and checking of qualifications. All the athletes had to swear before the statue of Zeus that they would keep the games rules. Competition began on the second day. The sacrifice 100 oxen (*hecatomb*) was the religious highlight of the third day, and the sixth day ended with further sacrifices and a celebratory for the victors.<sup>xxv</sup> In the Greeks' opinion, the olive tree is sacred, the olive wreaths awarded to the winners of the Olympic Games are very particular. They must be made from the wild olive trees near the Zeus altar, a boy whose parent was healthy was chosen to cut the branches with a golden sickle.<sup>xxvi</sup> Although the religious factor plays an important role in the Greek games, the Greek religion was after all a ritual religion. The Greeks pay more attention to the external ritual than internal faith. The Greeks feel that they are very close to their gods; there is no insurmountable gap between the gods and the human beings. In the polis system, there is no full time priest group. Sponsor of these Panhellenic games is the local government, the judges are chosen from the local celebrities, not the priests. In the Greeks' opinion, as M. I. Finley pointed out, "the gods were patrons of success rather than creators. but again not as the creator."<sup>xxvii</sup> The Zeus statue in Olympia was cast with the fines of the rule-broken athletes. Maybe, it is because of this characteristic of the Greek religion, the religion factor in the Classical athletic games became weaker and weaker. For example, the distance between the game site and worship place was gradually widening, they separated eventually at the end of 4 century B.C. However, someone thinks that the increase of the number of spectators is also an important reason.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In the Hellenistic Age, the quantity of the crown games increased. The agonal culture of Greece spread into every corner of the Alexander Empire. "The spread of periodic contests in the Greek style is a defining feature of post-Classical Hellenism."<sup>xxix</sup> Up to the Roman times, many local games transformed into Panhellenic games, the number of crown games continued to increase. In the time of Roman Empire, there are more than 20 Olympic Games outside Olympia.<sup>xxx</sup> Until the Christian religion became the official religion of Roman Empire, the athletic games began to be excluded. Frowned on by Christianity, Greek games (shorn of pagan ritual) none the less survived until at least 521, when Justinian banned the Olympia of Antioch.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Just as we point out above, the Greek agonal spirit permeated into many fields of social life. In the following part, we will take the philosophical study as the example to explain the phenomenon.

The British scholar prof. G. E. R. Lloyd is engaged in the research of the Greek science and philosophy for many years. He found that, in contrast to other civilizations, the study of philosophy in ancient Greece has a very strong inclination of disputation. In other words, there is full of agonal spirit in the philosophical study. It is well known that the Greek philosophy began at Miletus School, Lloyd pointed out that there are two obvious characteristics of the Miletus school which is different from the previous thinkers, one is the discovery of the nature, the other is the rational method of criticizing and arguing. A new tradition began from the Miletus School, that is, when the Greek philosophers set forth their views, they always mention and criticize others' opinion above all. The Greeks not only like debating, they but also are good at debating. In fact, this situation embodied not only in the philosophical study, but also in the field of political movement and lawsuit. Lloyd thinks that this style of philosophical study was probably influenced by the tendency of oral debate in the political and judicial movement.<sup>xxxii</sup> As is well known that the Greeks, especially the Athenians, were very good at debating. In the so many judicial debating texts, the speeches of the celebrities, Plato's dialogues, the drama contests, there are full of the atmosphere of debating. It is under this kind of condition, the Greek elocution, rhetoric and dialectics came into being and were fully developed. All these debates were held openly, the partakers must face many audiences. In order to get success in the debate, they have to improve their persuasive skill continuously, at the same time; they must make and keep some determined rule. Firstly, certain common premises must be decided before the debate begins. For example, in order to put into practice a justice verdict, we must give a definition of "justice" in advance, thus abstract definition becomes very important. In the same way, we have to obtain the definitions of 'truth', 'beauty', 'good' and 'being' in this kind of debate. So Seeking Truth became a universal and common target. At the same time, in order to get



truth in the debate, there must exist certain demonstration rule, hence formal logic came into being. Just as walter J. Ong said, it is no accident that formal logic firstly appeared and was fully developed in this disputatious people.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Although the athletic games and philosophical study are different social movement, the agonal spirit embodied in them is identical. There are at least three common characteristics: (1) The openness of *agon*. Both sport games and philosophical study were held in some public places of polis, these places belong to all the citizens, thus each citizen has right to take apart as a partaker, debater or spectator; (2) The fairness of *agon*. When athletic games or philosophical debate was held, all the partakers expect that it is a fair play, all the partakers are equal, the outcome of contest is the only factor to decide who will be the victor; (3) The Justice of the procedure. On the one hand, there must exist a set of game rules which can ensure the fairness of *agon*, the rules include laws, regulations or grammar; on the other hand, there must exist a neutral power outside the two sides to make a judgment according to the game rules, the power may be the referees, jurymen or spectators.

The Greek agonal spirit also influenced the way and method of the science research. In his *Adversaries and Authorities, Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), Prof. Lloyd made a comparative study of the way of science research between ancient Greece and ancient China from the angle of science history. He pointed out that generally speaking, in Greece, the researchers were accustomed to resort their answer to debate, while in ancient China, the thinkers were inclined to resort their conclusion to some ancient authorities. His point of view is very interesting and noteworthy.

In this book, he firstly pointed out that there is an obvious agonal trait in the philosophical and science research in Greece, i.e., when the Greek thinkers elucidated their views, they were accustomed to take a debating attitude, they depended on face-to-face argument to persuade the listeners to obtain their point of view. However, in ancient China, when expounding their point of views, the thinkers were inclined to depend on some ancient sages other than debate. In the following part, based on the analysis of some ancient texts of ancient China and Greece, Lloyd pointed out, in fact, the above-mentioned difference is not absolute, on the one hand, there did exist some concealed or open debate (辯) in the philosophical study of ancient China, the Dialecticians or the School of Names (名家) is an example; on the other hand, in late Hellenistic period, the trend of collaboration of the schools became more and more obviously, at the same time, the tendency of resort to authorities became stronger and stronger. Finally, Lloyd pointed out two noteworthy differences in the scientific research in ancient Greece and ancient China in a deeper level, Firstly, in contrast to China, the philosophical schools in Greece is more relaxed inside, they often split apart, the students could chose their teachers freely, they could criticize their teachers openly, disputation play an important role in their study; however, in ancient china, the relation of teacher and student is very like the relation between father and son, in binding force of *Jing*(经), the student could not oppose the teacher, his main task is protecting his School(家)through handing down *Jing*(经), debating is not encouraged, disputation(辯)is often a derogatory term, yet discussion is permitted. Secondly, in ancient China, the persuading object of the thinkers is often the kings, while in Greece, the persuading object is mainly the audience, adversaries or followers, it is because of this difference that the Greek philosophers paid more attention to the skills of debating, they were inclined to the theoretical construct, therefore, in contrast to their Chinese colleagues, their political ideals were seldom put into practice.

We know that there are full of competitions and contests in the natural world as well as in the human society. In other words, competition is one of the commonest communication mode among the human beings. According the research of biologist and anthropologist, in the animal field, because of the need of struggling for domain and breeding, compared with female animals, the male animals show more antagonism and hostility with each other.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As the human beings is a link in the chain of evolution, they must also obey the natural law. Therefore, in human society, the competition in the males is more often and stronger than in females. That is to say, competition is not only a social and cultural phenomenon, but also it has undoubtable biological basis.

Since competition is a common phenomenon in the human society, it is out of question that there do exist various kinds of competition and contest in all the civilizations throughout human history. So the contests did not only appear in ancient Greece. However the point is that only in Greece there developed an *agon* system and agonal spirit which was permeated into almost every aspects of *polis* life. From this point of view, *agon* was an unique creation of the Greeks in the ancient world. In the all kinds of *agon* of Greece, they showed an unflinching spirit of antagonism, the Greeks made it legalization, rationalization and formalization. It is from this kind of spirit that the western thinking tradition of binary opposition was formed. For examples, “Empedocles used adversatives to construct a cosmology, Hobbes to construct a kind of sociology, Hegel to construct a metaphysic of historical

change, Charles Darwin and Hebert Spencer to construct a bio-dynamics of ‘struggle’ for life.’<sup>xxxv</sup> All these may be traced back to the Greek agonal spirit.

That was a period when the oral debate was dominated. The so-called “dialectics” of the Greeks originated firstly from the art of public debate and speech. In his *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Letter, Plato expressed his viewpoint of writing, he thought that writing could make the living words and truth lost their vitality. Maybe for this reason, he used the form of dialogue in almost all his works.

Just as we mentioned above, although there is a few records of *agon* handed down by the Greeks, from very early time, they recognized the uniqueness of *agon* from the eyes of the non-Greeks. They also took it as a dividing line between the Greeks and non-Greeks. The Greek historian Herodotus was astonished to find out that there were no formal games in the long-standing Egypt.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Mark Golden pointed out, in the athletic movement of Egypt, “the pharaoh’s rejuvenating was apparently a symbolic act, no one against him. This, of course, is only an indirect form of competition, and one-sided. The pharaoh’s running and shooting have more in common with similar demonstration of a rule’s vitality from the ancient Near East”.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Therefore, the publicity and equality of *agon* are incompatible with the rigid hierarchy of ancient Egypt. In other words, there is no fair play between the unequal persons.

From this comparison, we can find the answer why the agonal spirit only came into being and fully developed in ancient Greece. The most important reason is that the Greeks realized the maximal equality in the range of citizens under the *polis* system. Although there existed differences in age, wealth or ability, these differences were not insurmountable, various kinds of *agon* gave the equal citizens so many opportunities to show their talent.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Of cause, this kind of totally equality is based on totally inequality, the most part of the population, including women, children, *metics* (resident aliens) and slaves, were excluded out of the games. This is not only the limitations of the *polis* system, but also the limitations of the ancient Greek *agon*.

As well as in ancient Egypt, the Greek type of *agon* did not come into being in ancient China. Some scholars pointed out, beside the restrictions of centralized government and rigid hierarchy, there is another important reason, i.e., contrary to attaching importance to competition of the Greeks, the ancient Chinese laid more stress on harmony and good order.<sup>xxxix</sup> However, it is not easy to answer the question. We have to make an overall and systematic comparison between the society of ancient Greece and ancient China. Were there any sport games in ancient China? How did the competitions in ancient China display? What are the similarities and differences between the competition phenomena of ancient Greece and ancient China? These questions are very interesting and noteworthy. Maybe we need another paper to find the answers.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Simon Hornblower & Antony Spawforth, edited, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.41.

<sup>ii</sup> This book is a speech anthology of Burckhardt, firstly published in 1902. The first selected English edition was published in 1963. In 1998, a new selected English edition entitled *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* (Harper Collins Publishers, London) was published, translated by Sheila Stern, edited with an introduction by Oswyn Murray. In Murray’s long introduction, he pointed out the importance of the great discovery of *agon* by Nietzsche and Burckhardt (xxxii), “apart from the creative enthusiasm which resulted from their meetings, undoubtedly the most significant specific idea about the Greek world that Burckhardt and Nietzsche shared was the belief in the importance of the ‘agonal’ aspect of Greek and (in Nietzsche’s case) modern culture. The realization that individual contest and the desire to be supreme lay at the centre of Greek attitudes to the world is their joint discovery. Nietzsche seems to have realized the importance of *agon* or contest, even before he arrived in Basle; but Burckhardt had already formulated it independently and was busy working out in detail the consequences of this discovery for the understanding of every aspect of Greek culture. This is indeed the most important of all Burckhardt’s insight into the Greek mentality, and has proved continually fruitful in Greek history to the present day, where Greek ethical values are often seen as a conflict between competitive and cooperative virtues.”

<sup>iii</sup> M.I.Finley, *Ancient History, Evidence and Models*, Viking Penguin Inc., New York, 1986, p.3.

<sup>iv</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.29.

<sup>v</sup> In the appendix of Mark Golden’s book *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, there is a bibliographical essay, it makes comprehensive summary of the achievements about Greek athletic games research in western academic field (including Germany, France, Italy, etc.) in the past 100 years.

<sup>vi</sup> From 1980s, after the athletic delegation of China began take part in the Olympic Games, the study of the history of Olympic Games in China sped up at the same time. In my point of view, the representative works of the research field include: Wang Zaiwu, Liu Xiuwu, Wang Fumin, *A short History of the Olympic Games*, Renmin Tiyu Press, 1981; Fan Yizhong, Ding Zhongyuan, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, Shandong Jiaoyu Press, 1982; Yu Keqin, Zhang Huijing, *A Short History of the Ancient Olympic Games*, Shanghai Renmin Press, 1986; Cui Liquan, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, Dazhong Wenyi Press, 2000; Li Yanling edited, *Encyclopaedia of the Olympic games*. There are many related academic papers. From the angle of religion, society, politics, economy and culture, the Chinese scholars make a systematic investigation of the ancient Olympic Games. For examples, Zhou Bo summarizes the characteristics of the Greek athletic games to three points, i.e. “distinctive military feature”, “strong religious feature” and “obvious national feature”, *Analysis of sports characteristic of ancient Greece*, Journal of Yunnan University, 2006, 28(s1). Zuo Furong analyses the origin of the ancient Olympic Games from the natural environment, the national spirit and religion, the Ancient Greeks, religion and the Olympic Games, *Academic Forum*, No.4, 2004. Some scholars discuss the relation between the origin of the Olympic Games and Greek religion, such as: Chen Yan & Zhao Yu, *On the Relation between Religions and Olympic Games*, Journal of Huazhong Normal University, May, 2007; Tong Xun, *Olympic Games and Religious Culture*, Journal of Beijing Union University, Dec., 2003; Wang Junqi & Rao Shaozhen, *Olympus religion and the Olympic Game*, Journal of Sports and Science, May, 2001. Some scholars analyse the relation between the Olympic Games and Greek polis system, such as: Chen Yan & Zhao Yu, *The political Factors of the Olympic Games*, Journal of Nankai University, No.2, 2007; Yang Tao & Lu Zhenyuan, *The Greek Polis System and the Origin of the Olympic Games*, Journal of Beijing University of Physical Education, Mar., 2000. Some scholars discuss the relation between ancient Greek economy and the Olympic games, such as Chen Zhiyue, Zeng Xianjun and Song Yueran, *The Ancient Greek Social Economy and the Ancient Olympic Games*, Sport Science and Technology, No.3, 2001. Some scholars discuss the Olympic Games from the angle of intellectual history, such as: Wang Wenhua, *the Greek athletic games and the Greek spirit*, Journal of University of International Relations, No.3, 2003; Chen Bin & Rao Yuan, *The Historic and Culture Reflection on the Rise and Fall of Ancient Olympics*, Journal of Yunnan Normal University; Li Liyan, *Sport and freedom of Grecian-Imprerions after Reading Parts of Hegel's Historical Philosophy*, Journal of Beijing University of Physical Education, Jan., 2002; Wang Shangda, *The Culture Significance of Ancient Greece Olympic Games*, Journal of Northwest Normal University. Besides, Li Liyan makes a comparative study between the warrior spirit of Ancient China and Greece, discussing the reason of why there did not spring out the sport games of Greek pattern in ancient China, *Why Chinese Ancient Sports Didn't Grow up*, Journal of Chengdu physical education Institute, No.2, 1995. According to Homer, He Yuanguo concludes that the Greek agon began in the Homeric Period, *Athletic Sport and the Homeric Society*, Journal of Physical Culture, No.7, 2007. From the angle of public space, Xie Guangyun pointed out that the public athletic locations of Greece provide an important space to the Greek agon, *Recreational-sports-nature Public Spaces and Competitive Activities of Athens City in Classical Age*, Journal of Shanghai University of Sport, Dec., 2005. To sum up, in the Chinese academic circle, the study of the ancient Greek sport games becomes a very important research field in recent years. At the same time, we have to admit that there are many shortcomings in these researches. An obvious weakness is that Chinese scholars generally pay little attention to the rich achievements of the foreign colleagues.

<sup>vii</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, pp.165-166.

<sup>viii</sup> Beside Pindar's hymns devoted to the winners and some fragmentary records of Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Plutarch and speeches, the only text which totally discoursed on athletic games is Philostratus' *On Athletic Exercise*.

<sup>ix</sup> Herodotus, *History*, II, 91.

<sup>x</sup> Olive branches were used in Olympia, laurel branches in Pythian Games, parsley or celery branches in Isthmian and Nemean Games.

<sup>xi</sup> M.I.Finley & H.W.Pleket, *The Olympic Games: the First Thousand Years*, London, 1976, p.21.

<sup>xii</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.35.

<sup>xiii</sup> When the Pan-Hellenic game winners came home, they could obtain other rewards as follows: free supplies of food (*sitesis*), the privilege of a front seat (*prohedria*) when spectating at *agones*, and gifts. Athens was especially generous to victors; Solon passed legislation to award Athenian victors at Olympia 500 drachmae. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.42.

<sup>xiv</sup> M.I.Finley & H.W.Pleket, *The Olympic Games: the First Thousand Years*, p.21.

<sup>xv</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.12.

<sup>xvi</sup> He Yuanguo, *Athletic Sport and the Homeric Society*, Journal of Physical Culture, No.7, 2007.

<sup>xvii</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, p.165.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Greek word *Olympiads* denotes the four-year interval between two Olympic Games. The Greeks often use *Olympiads* to calculate time.

<sup>xix</sup> Simon Hornblower & Antony Spawforth, edited, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.41.

<sup>xx</sup> It is said the winner of the state race of first Olympics in 776 B.C. was a local baker, Coroebus. See Nigel Wilson ed., *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Greece*, p.514. However, it is disputable on the degree of non-aristocracy taking part in the games, see Nike Fisher, *Gymnasia and the democratic values of leisure, in Kosmos. Essays in Order, Conflict and Community in Classical Athens*, edited by Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett & Sitta von Reden, Cambridge University Press, pp.85-86.

<sup>xxi</sup> There are two kinds of athletic contest in Greece, one is physical contest, the other is horse or chariot race. Different from physical contest, horse or chariot race is always the kingdom of the rich, for it is very expensive to buy and feed a horse in Greece. Possessing a horse became a mark of social status. Horse or chariot race is very popular event all the time, the rich often use the contest to raise their prestige in *polis*. It is noteworthy that the victors of horse or chariot race are not the driver but the owner of the horse or chariot. Besides, before going to Olympia, the partakers of the Olympic games have to take a ten month long training at their hometown, when get Elis, they have to take preliminary matches for 30 days, these difficulties prevent many poor people from taking part in it. See Nigel Wilson ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, p.310, p.515.

<sup>xxii</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.17.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Wang Wenhua, *the Greek athletic games and the Greek spirit*, Journal of University of International Relations, No.3, 2003.

- <sup>xxiv</sup> Wang Junqi & Rao Shaozhen, *Olympus religion and the Olympic Game*, Journal of sports and Science, May, 2001. Tong Xun, *Olympic Games and Religious Culture*, Journal of Beijing Union University, Dec., 2003.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Nigel Wilson ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, p.515.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.17.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> M.I.Finley & H.W.Pleket, *The Olympic Games: the First Thousand Years*, p.20.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.20, p.23.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Simon Hornblower & Antony Spawforth, edited, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.42.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.34.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Simon Hornblower & Antony Spawforth, edited, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.42.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> G.E.R.Lloyd, *Early Greek Science, Thales to Aristotle*, translated by Sun Xiaochun, Shanghai Science Technology and Education Press, 2004, p.7, p.13, p.136, p.137.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Fighting for Life, contest, sexuality, and consciousness*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1981, p.22.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Fighting for Life, contest, sexuality, and consciousness*, pp.53-57.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Ibid., p.16.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Herodotus, *History*, II, 91.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, p.31.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Chen yan & zhao Yu discuss the problem from the angle of religion and political system in their two articles (*On the Relation between Religions and Olympic Games*, Journal of Huazhong Normal University, May, 2007; *The political Factors of the Olympic Games*, Journal of Nankai University, No.2, 2007). In the former one, the authors pointed out, there did exist some kinds of athletic movement in non-Greek civilizations, such as ancient China and ancient India, at the same time, in these civilizations, the aim of the athletic movement was to honour the god as well as in Greece, however, only the Olympic Games of the ancient Greeks was held consistently and had a far-reaching influence. The reason is that the Greek religion carried within itself two unique concepts, one is equal personality among the citizens, the other is co-exist of spirit and flesh. The two concepts must work simultaneously. In ancient China, there did exist the concept of harmony between the body and soul but lack of equal personality; in ancient India, there existed equal personality in the thought of Buddhism, but lack of the concept of co-exist of spirit and flesh. Therefore neither in ancient China nor in ancient India there had the condition of giving birth to the Greek form of athletic games. In the latter paper, the authors pointed out that it is the equal citizenship of the polis provided a favorable political condition to the Greek form of fair competition, however, in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and India, there did not exist the Greek form of democracy, let alone the political concept of “citizen” and “equality”, the rigid hierarchy or casteism under monarchy prevented the Greek form of fair play from coming into being.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> John G, Blair & Jerusha Hull McCormack, *Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons*, Fudan University Press, 2006, p.42.